V

Dave Beck: Labor and Politics, 1918-1960

1.

It is the year 1951. In a big, quiet office that is paneled with lustrous dark wood and luxuriously carpeted, a large, bald, blue-eyed man of fifty-six sits behind a desk of Philippine mahogany. He talks pleasantly with his secretary, who has been with him for a quarter of a century, leafs rapidly through a stack of correspondence, and dictates decisive notes to his subalterns and flowery letters to his peers. Every few minutes he picks up the phone and tells the switchboard girl to get Indianapolis or Denver or Washington, D. C., or San Francisco. His voice is high, almost boyish, but his tone is one of command. He is the big boss.

His memo pad is full of the names of people who want to ask his favor or his advice, who hope he can make their way easier or more profitable. He speaks at service-club luncheons on such topics as "Americanism" and "The Second Half of Our Century"; he listens to speakers on similar subjects. He raises money for the Community Chest, helps promote the sales of apples and apricots,[1] and distributes football tickets to servicemen stationed at Fort Lewis and Fort Lawton. He has served on the State Board of Terms and Paroles, on the wartime Rubber and Oil Conservation Committee, and, though he did not finish high school, he became president of the Board of Regents of the state university, a non-paying

[1] A Teamster once complained that when Beck was trying to win the favor of the eastern Washington apple-growers, "We all ate apples till we damn near busted; then Dave got sore at those jokers across the mountains and we caught hell if anyone found an appleseed in our pocket."

position that his secretary estimated took one-fifth of his valuable time. (He resigned from the Board in May 1951 in protest over a raise in student fees.)

He likes to run things. He may talk over his problems with his doctor, whom he sees almost daily, or with his trusted lieutenants, or even with other businessmen, but he thinks it poor policy to consult workers about a decision unless he has to. "I'm paid twenty-five thousand a year to run this outfit," he told a reporter some years ago. "Why should truck drivers and bottle washers be allowed to make decisions affecting policy? No corporation would allow it." More recently he told a visitor, "I am a firm believer that the administration of a local union should be responsible to the members, but it should also have responsibility. It must be able to make decisions. That's what the officials are for, to sell what labor possesses, its own labor. Now to do that they must use business methods. That takes specialists. You can't take a vote on each question and you can't just haul a guy in off the street and let him negotiate with a high-powered lawyer. You can't even ask him to do office work. Truck drivers can't do those jobs. But they can decide whether we are getting them what they want and re-elect the officials who do get them what they want. When we get the best conditions for the men, and they re-elect us, then we are accomplishing what we are set up for."

Dave Beck, executive vice-president of the Teamsters and the dominant personality in present-day Seattle, is a plump and efficient businessman who cornered the local labor market during the thirties. He's a lot of other things too. He is the poor boy who made good; the kid who had to quit high school to earn a living and is now president of a three-and-a-half-million-dollar corporation. He is the man who took the Teamsters Union and made it into a better mouse trap. He is a self-made man, all right, and the finished product could have been turned out only in Seattle. Beck's pattern of thought, his conception of the role a labor leader should play, his ruthlessness, his ostentation, all are tinged by the

Seattle experience—by the boom-and-bust of the gold-rush days, by the corruption of the Gill administration, by the success of men like Considine and Pantages, and of other men like Jim Hill and Frederick Weyerhaeuser, by the toughness of the Wobblies, by the failure of the general strike.

Like a majority of Seattle residents, Beck was born elsewhere; in his case, in Stockton, California, on June 16, 1894. His father, Lemuel Beck, a carpet cleaner from Tennessee, worked hard and prospered not; Dave has referred to the old man as "the world's worst businessman." The Becks moved to Seattle in 1898, drawn by the glint of Klondike gold. They were to see precious little of it. Unable to pay passage to Alaska, Lemuel went back to carpet cleaning and odd jobs; his wife worked in a laundry and little David—he dislikes the name David, preferring the diminutive—hawked papers on the street after school hours. In his junior year at Broadway High School he dropped out to go to work, driving truck for a laundry.

The young redhead held the job for five years. He thought about changing things so no one would have to work as hard as his mother did for so little; he thought about how nice it would be to live like the people in the big wooden houses with the view of the bay and the Olympics.

Twenty-two-year-old Dave was still jockeying a truck and dreaming of a better life when two events changed his life. The first was a strike: the laundry drivers went out for more pay. The strike lasted three weeks and the union's gains were meager. It was the only big strike Beck ever took part in as a worker, and he hated it. "You lose more in pay than you get from the raise in years," he complained later. Others argued that the employers lost too, that next time they would be easier to deal with, but for Dave it was a pure matter of dollars and cents. He wanted stability, not strikes.

The other event was the war. Dave joined the Navy; he got a rating as machinist's mate and went overseas, to England, where

he rode in Curtiss seaplanes that patrolled the North Sea against German Zeppelins. He must have done a lot of thinking about his future during this period. When he returned to Seattle after the war he acted like a man who knew exactly what he wanted, and how to get it.

Beck wanted money and he wanted a responsible position in the Teamsters Union, a position where he could shape policy. He wanted to work for stability, not strikes. Seattle, when Dave shucked his Navy blues, was a city tight with the tension raised by the general strike. Beck thought the strike had been wrong, criminally wrong; it had been impetuous, it had been pointless; it had brought disrepute to Labor and had won nothing. He was disgusted with the idealists who had dreamed it up. He was disgusted with the Wobblies who had preached general strike. He would no longer answer when the Wobblies greeted him as a "fellow worker."

Back on the laundry run, Beck went all out to get customers. When one of the drivers remarked that the boss got a bigger cut from each new customer than the driver did, Beck is reported to have said, "He ought to. It's his business."

Dave was soon making a hundred a week on his laundry run, good money in 1920. When he wasn't selling housewives on the merits of his laundry, he was selling other drivers on the merits of Dave Beck. They elected him business agent of Laundry Drivers' Local 566. He was on his way. He took extension courses in public speaking and economics; he dressed like a young businessman, made speeches before any group that would listen, warned business people against radicals, warned workers about the danger of being unorganized. "Organize! Organize!" was his favorite topic; if you were organized you won without striking. By 1924 he was secretary of his union. Dan Tobin, the national boss of the Teamsters, had his eye on him. San Francisco's Bloody Mike Casey, who had organized the Teamsters of the other great West Coast port, thought the hefty, businesslike redhead had the stuff. After the Teamsters

held their national convention in Seattle in 1925 Dave was hired as an organizer.

The next two years were a time of prosperity for the city, the nation, the union, and Dave Beck, but it was the depression that made the Teamster boss the ruler of Seattle.

2.

In the early thirties Seattle lay gray and sullen under the shadow of the great depression. The mills were shut down and piles of lumber slowly rotted in the open sheds. The wharves were almost deserted; a fleet of ghost ships rode at long anchor in Lake Union, rusting to uselessness. It didn't pay the men who owned the trim boats tied up at Ballard docks to make a fishing run. Vacant storefronts dotted Third and Fourth Avenues. A man could get a full meal for twenty cents in any of a dozen joints south of Yesler Way, but many went hungry. Hundreds of men sat glumly on the curbs along the Skid Road, or elbowed one another around the blackboards in front of the employment agencies, or prowled the alleys looking for food and salvage; those who found something good might eat it on the spot, or they might scurry back to the shacktown that had risen on the site of an abandoned shipyard at the southern edge of the Skid Road, a new community known as Hooverville.

No civic association has erected a plaque with the names of the latter-day pioneers who raised the first shacks on the flats between the Connecticut Street dock and the Central Terminal of the Port of Seattle. It is improbable that pageants will commemorate their landing or that civic dignitaries will discourse on the pioneering impulse that led the men of the thirties to build homes in the wilderness. Yet the unheralded pioneers of the depression days were impelled by motives similar to those that had moved the men who had settled at Alki. They wanted a place where they could live a life of their own. Their settlement grew much faster than early-day Seattle had; it expanded so rapidly that the city administration,

like the Salish Indians, became worried; in the interests of the health of the established community, the administration ordered the police and fire departments to destroy the shacktown. Hooverville was burned to its damp foundations, but pioneer determination was in its makers. Like the men of '89 after their fire, the shacktown citizens rebuilt "before the ashes grew cold."

When the Denny party built its community it was hindered by a lack of tools and capital but was aided by the bounty of the forests, which stood thick to the edge of the clay cliffs. The pioneers of the depression were even shorter of capital, just as shy of tools, and they had no forest to which they could repair for lumber; there was not a log cabin in all Hooverville. The shacks were constructed of materials rustled from the docks, the railroads, the dumps: tin and tarpaper and packing-box boards, that's what Hooverville was made of.

In 1934 a young sociologist from the University of Washington, gathering material for a thesis, came to live in the community. His name was Donald Francis Roy, and he did not tell his neighbors his mission, though eventually they found it out. In his sprightly document, Mr. Roy gives a good picture of life in the community.[2]

The houses ranged from roofed dugouts, like the native *barabaras* some of the old-timers may have seen in Alaska, to a cottage, built by an unemployed carpenter, that boasted a kitchen, a dining room, two bedrooms, a storeroom, and a front porch. One residence was two stories tall; the others followed the contour of the tideflats. In a few of the shacks the only furnishings were bedclothes: a heap of gunny sacks, three old overcoats, a pair of mattresses, one to be slept on, the other under. The sociologist was startled to find that one man had made a bed out of a coffin. Another slept under a verdant strip of artificial lawn stolen from a window display.

[2] Donald Francis Roy, *Hooverville: A Study of a Community of Homeless Men in Seattle.* (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Washington, 1935.)

Nearly all the shacks had cook stoves, which varied from second-hand ranges to oil cans with holes punched in them. The stoves doubled as furnaces but, the saying went, "the only way to keep warm is to work up a sweat hunting fuel." The men spent hours combing the beach for bark ("fishermen's coal") and driftwood; they paced the railroad tracks in search of bits of coal; they raided woodpiles. The stoves quickly warmed the tiny shacks but smoke was always a problem. The smoke hurt the men's eyes and discouraged reading on the long, wet, winter nights—and so did the men's educational background. Few had been exposed to much formal education. Of 632 men living in Hooverville when Mr. Roy took an informal census, twelve per cent had never attended school at all; eighty-nine per cent had not finished the eighth grade. There was a superstition in the thirties that all the hobo jungles were alive with Ph.D.s, but only five of the 632 had been graduated from college. Another five had taken classes for a year or two. Of the ten college men, four were Filipinos.

Mr. Roy had as neighbors 632 men and 7 women. The men ranged in age from fifteen (a young homosexual) to seventy-three (a destitute physician); in nationality from a majority of whites of North European extraction to a Chilean Indian and a pair of Eskimos. There were 292 foreign-born whites, 120 Filipinos, 29 Negroes, 25 Mexicans, 2 Japanese, 2 American Indians, and 3 Costa Ricans.

A third of the men in Hooverville had worked in the lumber camps, but the total range of their occupations, as listed by Mr. Roy, reads like an ode by Walt Whitman to the builders of a nation:

Logger, fire fighter, foreman,
Section hand and brakeman;
Civil engineer, bridge carpenter, shovel runner, powder monkey,
Miner, coal miner, gold miner, hard rock miner;
Fisherman, farmer, seaman, petty officer, and ship carpenter;
Camp cook, dishwasher, bullcook, waiter, flunkey.

Painter and steamfitter, electrician and machinist helper;
Pipefitter and paperer;
Barrel-head maker.
Millwright, street grader, blacksmith, stonecutter,
Shoemaker, molder,
Bricklayer, structural iron worker, tinsmith.
Storekeeper, salesclerk, butcher, nightwatchman.
Restaurant owner.
House-to-house salesman.
Truck driver, teamster, longshoreman,
Street car conductor.
Racehorse groom, animal trainer, dairy instructor in a Swiss college.
Missionary to the Indians.
Sewer digger, schoolteacher, dope peddler, sewer cleaner.
Laborer.

They had done everything, but now they had nothing to do. Their common bond was poverty. Almost half of them were drawing relief: 188 had papers permitting them to patronize the breadline, 86 received weekly commissary vouchers of $1.20, 25 got $6 a month from the county, 10 worked in the county woodyard six days a month for $3 a day. Some had part-time jobs uptown. One man, a carpenter by trade, built skiffs for sale to owners of fishing boats. The rest touched householders for food or raided the garbage cans behind the markets. They were proud of their ability to stay off relief.

It was not safe to accumulate property, at least movable property. A man who had the foresight to choose a Chinese lottery ticket worth $300 did not have the foresight to lock his door; he was found bludgeoned to death in his tin-plated shack. A Negro bragged that he had made $11 in one week, gathering and selling wastepaper. Two men, ignorant of the fact that he also earned money as a heavyweight boxer, tried to expropriate his capital. The man of means put down this share-the-wealth movement with a right-cross and a left hook.

Yet by and large Hooverville was orderly. Certainly the citizens

were not revolutionists. They were old and tired and hoped they had found a place where they would be let alone. While a majority blamed the economic system for their problems, their real antagonism was directed toward the relief officials with whom they most often came in contact. Many of the older men firmly believed that the interns at the county hospital "used the black bottle"—that is, poisoned aged men from Hooverville who came to them for treatment. They were afraid of the city police and the health authorities. They lived under the constant threat of having their homes burned again as a sacrifice to the health of the larger community.

A six-man vigilante committee helped enforce the sanitation code in Hooverville. (The code regulated traffic to the six privies set over the beach and reached by rickety catwalks.) In the pioneer tradition the committee had no official power but it was respected. It had been elected at a community caucus, attended by only one-fifth of the residents, and the Hooverville committeemen, like their councilman brothers in the County-City Building uptown, deplored the low vote. Members served until removed by death or prosperity. Two whites, two Negroes, and two Filipinos were chosen to the committee. Political domination in Hooverville swung to the man with the greatest lust for power, a Texas cowpoke who just hankered to run things. He served as ex-officio mayor. Since no elections were held after the first caucus and no recall system had been outlined, his election was permanent. The principal challenge to the Texan's political ascendancy came when a neighbor got drunk on denatured alcohol and announced that it was his intention to behead the entire council, including the mayor. The Texan met this revolt by rallying his fellow officeholders and capturing the agitator; after beating him up, they deported him to the Seattle jail, tore down his shack, and distributed the boards among those whose houses needed patching. During the battle the mayor stopped a coffee mug with the top of his head but didn't bother to seek medical attention. As a badge of office he

wore a towel-turban for two weeks. He also kept the community radio, a battery set donated to Hooverville by a relief agency. It was the most conspicuous spoil of office, and it sat on the porch of the mayor's house. He kept it turned on loud so that each and every one of his constituents could learn daily of the torments suffered by people like "John's Other Wife."

The men of Hooverville, like the earlier men of Seattle, had one great problem: no women. Only 6 of the 600 were living with women they claimed as their legal helpmeets; only 95 men in the entire community had ever been married. These were the men who, a generation earlier, had become Wobblies, had answered the IWW call to the homeless, the voteless.

"The rest of the men are living without the domestic companionship of the opposite sex," the young sociologist observed. "Their transient association with women might better be described under the head of Recreation instead of Family. Such social contacts are necessarily limited in the main by economic considerations. Some of those who occasionally come in possession of legal tender through odd jobs or junking invest small sums in the more economical brothels of the Skid Road. Now and then 'squaws' from uptown participate in little firesides at the homes of popular Hooverites. When sober, these older and less attractive battleaxes offer their services for sums ranging from ten cents to thirty-five cents. When they are properly intoxicated, or are presented with the prospects of becoming so, cash is not necessary. . . ."

Uptown elements suspected the citizens of the tideflats of staging orgies, but orgies were among the many things these men could not afford. The most popular pastimes were reading, cards, bull sessions, and cheap drunks. The books featured sex; the card games were poker and blackjack and fan-tan (almost never bridge) for low stakes or none; the bull sessions ranged from sex to politics and back to sex; the drunks were staged on denatured alcohol—"dehorn" to the initiated. The nearest thing to orgies would be friendly fights, quickly broken up by the vigilante committee, or

community sings, or arguments (sings and arguments being distinguishable in their early stages), or walks to Pioneer Square to study the posters in front of the three bump-and-grind houses operated by latter-day Considines. These men were too poor and dispirited to be flamboyantly depraved; most of them were too old. "I never expect to work again," the men of Hooverville often said. "They all say I'm too old."

There were a few rebels in Hooverville, but their sparks set no flames. There were a few Communists, but they could do little more than pass out literature and inject some dialectics into the bull sessions. These were men who had reached the end of the trail.

In the Skid Road proper, and farther uptown, things were different. The economic system that had spewed up Hooverville-on-the-Tideflats was rousing discontent. A great many people agreed that "there must be a better way," but there was little agreement on the details of the better way. Communists and Trotskyists, Socialists and Silver Shirts, Single-Taxers and Wobblies, advocates of all the standard-brand remedies talked up their economic antidotes and found willing takers. Other medicine men were dreaming up home cures. The Seattle Unemployed Citizens' League offered a self-help palliation that was tried by thousands.

"The Republic of the Penniless" was what a sympathetic advertising man called the Unemployed Citizens' League, and the phrase was exact. It *was* a community within the community. The League was an outfit with no dues and no paid officers, a self-help organization of workers without work. It was formed in the fall of 1931 and at its peak had more than 50,000 members in Seattle and as many more scattered throughout the state. Its members lived by a barter economy. They ran their own shoeshops and barbershops; they sewed one another's dresses and repaired one another's jalopies; they fixed plumbing and patched roofs; they fished and cut wood and dug potatoes and picked apples; all on a barter basis. Each member worked at what he knew; each received what he

needed most. "In this Republic of the Penniless," wrote an observer, "honorable employment was all that passed for currency." During the fall and winter of 1931, 120,000 pounds of fish, 10,000 cords of firewood, eight carloads of potatoes, pears, and apples were furnished for unemployed relief by the unemployed themselves. The League demanded and received the right to distribute relief food supplies purchased with county and city funds. No money went to pay salaries, so the entire amount was available for food: $2.16 a week for a family of four.

Nobody was getting rich off relief, but the existence of a large body of citizens—enfranchised, mind you—who were experimenting with a production-for-use economy upset many businessmen. How, they asked, can merchants sell their goods if a considerable portion of the population is permanently kept from the market by a production-for-use scheme? Late in 1932, as the national economy scraped the bottom of the depression, a reporter climbed the steps to the headquarters of the League, which were in a big, bare loft formerly occupied by the High Hatters Cabaret, to ask the League's president what the ultimate aim of the organization was. And J. F. Cronin, a tired man of sixty-nine, who had been a newspaperman himself until he was laid off in his old age, said he didn't know where the League was headed but that it would keep going as long as there was need.

"We're dreadfully close to this problem and the outlook is dark," Cronin said. "We fail to understand how men in dominating political, financial, and industrial positions can ignore the necessity for fundamental change if the present worldwide breakdown is to be corrected. We're doing our best to meet a situation not of our own making. We have unworthy ones in our ranks, yes, but they are less than five per cent of our total. Most of our members are good people. Good people! I never knew until I got into this work how good people can be. Most of us in this work are near life's halfway mark or beyond. What happens to us doesn't matter very

much. But it's hard for the youngsters to understand. Human life is terribly short and tomorrow comes soon. We'd like to see it dawn a little brighter for the children."

How to brighten the dawn? Some thought it could be glorified by political action.

The Unemployed Citizens' League went into politics. A few months after the League was formed it asked the city council for use of the Civic Auditorium to hold a mass meeting. The request was denied. At the next city election a trio of candidates unofficially supported by the League ran one-two-three in the race for councilman; and *that* was followed by a new vote in which the city council not only granted the League the use of the Auditorium but instructed the municipal streetcar system to supply free transportation the evening of the meeting. This simple demonstration of the power of the ballot encouraged League officials to think of entering politics. A state federation of Unemployed Citizens' Leagues was formed. Its first purpose was to arrange for an exchange of services between the unemployed in farm and urban communities, a barter of food for goods turned out in co-operative workshops. The federation also made it possible to take political action on a statewide basis. Some dreamers talked of filing an Unemployed Ticket, with jobless candidates running for every office from governor to county coroner.

The federation held a state convention in Tacoma. Delegates arrived on foot, on the rods, in their own jalopies; one rode in on a mule and, on arriving, told a Tacoma newspaperman that he had neither food nor shelter and that while *he* could last out the depression, he was afraid it would kill his mule.

At the convention the unemployed decided that instead of running their own people it would be more effective to throw the support of the League to candidates filed under more orthodox banners. The jobless—and the rest of the voters—had some odd candidates to choose from that year, and they elected a number of the weirdest. A candidate who ran on a one-plank platform

against hot foods was defeated, but a man who conducted the latter phases of his campaign from jail, where he had been placed on a charge of raping a twelve-year-old girl, was elevated to public office. A brilliant young lawyer named Marion Zioncheck won his first political race. So did John C. Stevenson, a professional radio orator. A collection of utopians and Communists and reformers, some of them good men and some awful, won seats in the State Legislature. A donkey was elected as a Republican precinct committeeman. But of all the odd ones who clamored for the attention of the electorate, the oddest by far was a dapper young man with a thin waxed mustache and an air of raffish dignity, Victor Aloysius Meyers, the joke that backfired.

Vic Meyers operated Seattle's most celebrated night spot, the Club Victor, and led its best dance band. He was a glib, personable master of ceremonies who suffered the usual occupational disabilities of his professions: he was often broke and sometimes in trouble with the federal authorities charged with enforcing the Volstead Act. He was a favorite with reporters. His name was news. Everybody knew Vic and he was always good for a laugh. It was worth a two-column picture when the government noticed that people were drinking at the Club Victor and padlocked the joint as a nuisance. It was copy when he won a radio contest as the coast's most popular M. C. It even seemed funny and worth a picture when he fell off a stepladder and broke his arm.

One dull afternoon in January 1932 a group of newspapermen were talking about the collection of fatuous has-beens and neverwases who were seeking to become mayor of Seattle. The only colorful figures in the race was John F. Dore, a stumpy little trial lawyer with a rasping vocabulary and a gift for saw-toothed phrases, but Dore was running under wraps; he was the businessman's candidate, and not even Irish Johnny could be lively on the subject of efficiency in municipal government. The rest of the candidates were hardly worth quoting. Somebody remarked that

Vic Meyers was better copy than the whole kit-and-kaboodle. The remark set Doug Welch to thinking happy thoughts. Doug was an assistant city editor on the *Times* [3] and the most efficient humorist then practicing in the Northwest. The idea of Vic Meyers as a candidate for mayor appealed to him; Vic would be a good peg on which to hang some satirical feature stories about the other candidates. After clearing it with the higher brass, Doug phoned Vic and told him that if he'd hustle down to the County-City Building and file for mayor, the *Times* would give him an eight-column bannerline on page one and follow that up with daily pictures and features for the duration.

Vic thought it was a lovely idea, and so did the *Times*' readers, for with Welch and every happy cynic in the city room thinking up gags, Meyers put on a wonderful campaign. His slogan was a straight-faced parody of all the short, meaningless slogans dreamed up to fit on advertising placards: "Watch 'er Click with Vic." He announced that he would campaign in shirt sleeves, to prove he was not a representative of the vested interests, but later he took to wearing tuxedo, silk scarf, top hat, velvet-lapeled overcoat, and kid gloves. "Somebody," he explained, "has to give this campaign a little class."

Meyers drove a beer wagon around town. His band played "Happy Days Are Here Again," and Vic parked the wagon at intersections and harangued the townsfolk on topics of the day. There was the usual argument about daylight-saving time and Vic took a firm stand. "I don't believe in it. Seattle should have two-four time, allegro." He burlesqued the economy speeches that John Dore was making. "I'm not very economical and thrifty myself, but you ought to see my wife! As soon as I am elected, I will turn over the city to her. In two weeks Edinburgh will appoint a commission to come and study the economies my wife will put in."

[3] It sometimes seems to outsiders that everybody on the *Times* is an assistant city editor. I once asked a former a.c.e. about it and he said, "It's a job reporters work up to and friends of the Blethens work down to."

Dore was against waste, and so was Vic: he suggested putting flowerboxes around all the fire hydrants to utilize any water that dripped out.

Vic came out four-square in favor of graft. "There's not going to be any cheap chiseling on city contracts while I'm mayor," he said. "I'm going to take it all myself." On other topics he was less flat-footed, explaining that he had noticed that mayors who said "yes" ran into a lot of trouble and those who said "no" had even more. So he was going to be the nation's first "Maybe Man."

Sometimes a serious citizen would ask Vic how he stood on some topic. When he couldn't think of a wisecrack Vic would roll his eyes thoughtfully heavenward, wait a moment, then nod, smile, and lean forward. "I'm okay on that," he would assure his questioner.

He had more gag writers than a radio comedian, and they delighted in thinking up stunts for him. All the candidates were promising to do something about Seattle's streetcars, which were ancient and ugly and flat-wheeled. Vic suggested hostesses, and when Laura La Plante, a reigning blonde in Hollywood, visited town, Vic took her for a streetcar ride. He generously gave her credit for the suggestion that the hostesses supply cracked ice on the late evening cruises.

When all the candidates were invited to speak at a luncheon of one of the service clubs, Vic arrived dressed as Mahatma Gandhi, leading a goat. He sat at the speakers' table sipping goat's milk and munching raw carrots and looking at his rivals over the top of his gold-rimmed spectacles. His very presence made all the speeches ridiculous.

It was good fun. Nobody took it seriously except the *Star* and the *Post-Intelligencer*, which sniffed disdainfully about degradation of the electoral process, and Vic himself. As the campaign wore on and he listened to more of his rivals' speeches, Vic arrived at the opinion the reporters had started with—that he was as good as any of the other bums in the race. From the time that notion

assailed him, Vic was a problem to his gag writers. He wanted to talk about issues. He was the comedian hellbent on playing Hamlet. Toward the end of the campaign he announced that the comedy was over; from here on in he was out for votes, not laughs. For many this statement seemed the ultimate in deadpan hilarity, but Vic was serious. He finished sixth in the primary field of ten. The *Times*, in his name, demanded a recount. Vic suggested that the FBI study the fingerprints in all the polling booths. Then he went back to leading his dance band—but only briefly. After a few months in which he failed to gain an inch of front-page space, Vic phoned Doug Welch and suggested another campaign, this time for governor. Welch said the gag had worn thin; anyway, once was enough. Not for Vic. He decided to run unsponsored, drove down to Olympia, and appeared at the state capitol, ready to file. He was less ready when he learned the filing fee was sixty dollars. "That's too much," said Vic. "What do you have for twenty?" "Well," said the clerk, "you could file for lieutenant governor. That's twelve." Vic hesitated. "I can't spell it," he said thoughtfully, "but I'll take it."

Vic worked hard at his campaign. He used the gags Welch had dreamed up, but he had the swing of it now and made up some for himself. He beat tom-toms on an Indian reservation and expressed surprise when told that wards of the government had no vote. He played his saxophone at a lumber camp. He again wrapped himself in Gandhi's mantle. He assured the voters he was okay—but he also came out for pensions, children's welfare measures and unemployment compensation. None of the professionals took him seriously, not until the September primaries. In the privacy of the voting booth, Washington citizens scanned the long list of candidates for lieutenant governor and found there the familiar name of Vic Meyers. Enough voters pulled the lever or marked the "X" beside his name to make him the nominee of the Democratic Party.

The joke had gone far enough. It looked as though 1932 would be a Democratic year, and the last two Democratic governors had

died in office. Clarence D. Martin, the nominee for governor, was a gaunt gentleman who looked none too durable. Republicans—and many Democrats—asked the voters, "Do you want a man like Vic Meyers just a heartbeat away from the governorship?" On election day 286,402 of them did, which was 40,000 more than wanted Vic's Republican opponent.

So Vic had the last laugh.[4] He announced that he would hold a coming-out-of-the-red party for his creditors; he also expressed hope that someone would tell him how to do whatever it was a lieutenant governor did. Editorial writers throughout the nation shuddered in print for the fate of the state.

Meyers' election by itself might have been a meaningless absurdity, made possible by the voters' preference for a familiar name in the primary and by the Roosevelt landslide in the final; but into office throughout the state went other representatives of discontent, symbols of protest against the orthodox and the respectable.

Three months after the election, with the lumber industry prostrate and the number of jobless at an all-time peak, the Unemployed Citizens' League announced a protest march on Olympia, a maneuver designed "to call the attention of the representatives of the owner class to the need for drastic action." There were those who seriously hoped, and those who wildly feared, that the march would touch off a social revolution. Not since the general strike had there been violent talk. Wobblies and Communists and Socialists all struggled to dominate the League and to control the protest march. An organizer for the American Vigilantes, a fascist organization of the day, appeared in Olympia and instructed citizens in the way to handle demonstrators. "Temper your severity to

[4] It is a laugh that still echoes in Washington politics. In 1951 Vic has a year to go in his fifth term. He has survived two elections in which the Republicans won the governorship. The *Times* has frequently carried exposés on the activities of its former protégé, the most recent having to do with Vic's use of a state Cadillac while on a vacation trip to the Southwest. "What's the fuss?" Vic asked. "Sure it's the state's car but I paid for the gas."

suit the occasion," the Vigilantes were told. "If forced to fight, don't forget that nothing so swiftly sickens a mob as brutal, stomach-wrenching, soul-sickening force, fearlessly and judiciously applied."

The marchers and the Vigilantes met at the top of the hills that surround Olympia; there was no violence. Most of the demonstrators turned aside, which was, perhaps, a symbol of a new era, for after March 1933 there was less talk of violent revolution and more of a revolution through due process. Nationally the first Roosevelt administration was starting its Hundred Days of reform, and locally the radicals recently elected were learning to distinguish one another and were starting to form ranks in an almost united front.

The Washington Commonwealth Federation was made up of unions (though the Central Labor Council frowned on it), public-power advocates, Townsendites and other pension planners, the remnants of the Unemployed Citizens' League (which rapidly lost strength as national relief measures became effective), Communists, ex-Wobblies, some Socialists, unaffiliated radicals, Technocrats, and a large body of liberals. The common denominator was desire for change.

The Federation's program was flexible and opportunistic, sometimes sounding like the New Deal, sometimes like the Communist Party, but there was no question that it was the most radical movement to approach power since the Populists captured the governorship in 1896. The Communists, though by no means in absolute control of the Federation, were in position to influence its day-to-day operations; most of the key shifts in Federation policy paralleled shifts in Communist policy. These changes were often abrupt, especially the ones involving foreign policy, and along with the shifts in domestic viewpoint—shifts which made Roosevelt alternately saint and devil—they eventually confused and alienated much of the Federation's mass support.[5] But in the rosy days of

[5] The basic shifts can be interpreted pretty well through the changes in title of the Federation's paper. It was first called the *Commonwealth Builder*, then the *Sunday News*. The name was next changed to *The New Dealer*, but in 1940, when Roosevelt was a "warmonger" and the Commonwealth's president the only delegate to the Democratic convention who wouldn't vote for his renomination, the paper became *The New World*. *The New World* collapsed in 1949, most of its staff and some of its circulation going over to *The People's World*, the organ of the Communist Party on the Pacific Coast, published in San Francisco.

the mid-thirties the radicals were joined in happy federation, united against the forces of entrenched conservatism—in their eyes, united against evil. A new world was a-borning.

The birth pains were sharpest, perhaps, at the 1936 state Democratic convention in Aberdeen. Technically the Commonwealth Federation was independent politically, endorsing candidates already filed in other parties; actually it operated as the left wing of the Democratic Party. In 1936 the Federation delegates stampeded the Democratic convention. When the conservative opposition, who controlled the convention machinery, tried to use parliamentary tactics to neutralize the voting strength of the "wild men from Seattle," the assembled radicals, led by a former drama critic, a former history professor, and a former barber, simply marched onto the platform, took over the agenda, voted themselves power, and carried on. The chairman splintered four gavels before the convention ended; the delegates broke political precedent with even greater frequency. When the shouting died down and the Democrats read the minutes, they found the Party was on record as favoring the nationalization of all banks, public ownership of all utilities and natural resources, and production for use; but it was not on record as favoring the re-election of President Roosevelt.

Having rewritten the Democratic platform to its own highly seasoned taste, the Commonwealth Federation endorsed the Democrats it considered deserving. Among them were Marion Zioncheck for re-election to Congress, John C. Stevenson for governor (against the Democratic incumbent), and Vic Meyers for lieutenant governor. These choices were not altogether fortunate. Vic was a joke, though perhaps a good one; Stevenson a plausible phony; and Zioncheck was mad, quite mad, and about to prove it.

Marion Zioncheck was perhaps the ablest radical Seattle ever produced. He was a brilliant, tough young Pole who had been brought to America at the age of three. He grew up on the Skid Road. He was poor, grindingly poor; at various times he worked as logger, fish peddler, rat catcher (ten cents a head), dishwasher, cowboy. He decided he wanted to be a lawyer and enrolled at the University of Washington, dropped out for four years to keep his folks in food, but came back, older and tougher. The fraternity system galled him. He organized the independents into an anti-Greek coalition and in 1928 he was elected president of the student body. As soon as he was in office he started investigating the way the athletic department was spending money; a mysterious fire destroyed some of the records, and a posse of football players captured Zioncheck, shaved his head, and tossed him into Frosh Pond. Twenty-one years and two Rose Bowl teams later, the students got the recreation building Zioncheck had recommended.

Admitted to the bar in 1929, Zioncheck barely had his diploma in place on the wall of his crackerbox office before he was mixed up in another good fight. He led a movement to recall Seattle's mayor, Frank Edwards, who was playing with private power people against what Zioncheck considered the best interests of City Light. The voters agreed, the mayor was recalled, and young Zioncheck was a political power.

He ran for Congress in 1932. "I am a radical," he would say at the start of a speech. "I guess I always have been. I hope I always will be." He won, and he won again in 1934. No congressman worked harder than young Zioncheck. (He was thirty-two when he was elected for his first term.) He was tough and hard-minded and diligent. He tried to read every bill considered by the House; he refused to compromise; he fought whatever he felt was wrong —racism, the Silver Shirts, the use of the National Guard to break strikes. He said, "People aren't paying taxes so that the National

Guard can see to it that scabs get in there and break strikes." He was against big military expenditures; and though the Bremerton Navy Yard was one of the great payrolls in his district, he voted against increased naval appropriations. He thought the Townsend Plan was a fraud and he told the old folks so, while others hedged. He was tough and arrogant and he sometimes said, "I'm the best congressman our state ever had." The voters in his home district adored him—or hated him; some observers thought he would become the dominant political figure in the Northwest, but nationally nobody noticed him, not until New Year's morning, 1936, when he rolled into the lobby of a fancy Washington, D. C., apartment house, plugged in all numbers on the telephone switchboard and wished all the occupants a happy New Year. He sobered up in jail. "The police department is lousy," he told his captors.

A few weeks later the cops had him again. He wanted to know what he'd done this time. "You were driving seventy miles an hour on a crowded street," he was told. "It couldn't have been me," said Zioncheck. "I'd have been doing eighty." He borrowed money to pay his fine.

Rubye Louise Nix, a WPA typist from Texarkana, thought his exploits cute and on an impulse telephoned him. Zioncheck liked her voice, asked for a date, got it, and married her the next day. He borrowed the two-dollar license fee from a court clerk.

The Zionchecks gave an interview to the press (he was wearing an Indian suit and drawing a long bow) in which Rubye explained that she hoped to reform him. They started south on a honeymoon trip in Zioncheck's secondhand, twelve-cylinder convertible. They outran some cops, were caught by others. In Florida, Rubye bought Marion a kiddie car and told reporters she'd do all the driving in the family; but in Puerto Rico, Marion borrowed a car, sideswiped a truck, drove through a locked gate, was challenged to a duel, took part in a student riot, threw coconuts out of his hotel window, and finally demanded that the Marines be

sent to protect him. He went next to the Virgin Islands, where he was noticed lapping soup from his plate at a swank hotel and biting the neck of the chauffeur assigned to pilot his car.

On his return to New York he went wading in the Rockefeller Center pool, judged a beauty contest in a night club, scuffled with the boy friend of one of the losers, and gave a rhumba exhibition. When the Zionchecks got back to Washington their landlady told them they'd have to move. Marion threw her out. The cops came again. Zioncheck posted bail of twenty-five dollars and complained of persecution. The next day Rubye disappeared. Marion accused Vice-President Garner of kidnaping her; as a protest he delivered empty beer bottles to the White House. Then Rubye returned.

At last someone realized that his actions weren't publicity gags and he was hustled off to a sanitarium. His enemies wrote his political obituaries. On the Fourth of July 1936 he escaped from the sanitarium, returned to Seattle, and announced that he would run for re-election. His friends failed to talk him out of it. Then he changed his mind and withdrew from the race, changed it again and started his campaign.

On a lovely day early in August he drove with Rubye and his brother-in-law, William Nadeau, to the Arctic Building. While the others waited, Zioncheck went "to get some papers" in the fifth-floor office he had rented as campaign headquarters. Rubye and Nadeau waited ten minutes. Nadeau was nervous, for Zioncheck's psychiatrist had told him that same day, "You'd better keep an eye on Marion," so he went up to the office. The door was locked and Zioncheck didn't answer when Nadeau knocked. Nadeau got the janitor to unlock it. Zioncheck was sitting at his desk, writing. He was flushed and seemed nervous.

"Come on, Marion," Nadeau said, "or we'll be late for your speech."

Zioncheck shook his head and continued to write. Nadeau called him again. Zioncheck threw down his pen, pushed the paper to the floor, and got to his feet.

"You have a hat, haven't you?" Nadeau asked.

"It's on the shelf," Zioncheck said, nodding toward the anteroom.

"I'll get it," said Nadeau. He found the hat and came back to the room. As Nadeau came through the door, Zioncheck ripped off the light gray suitcoat he was wearing and dived headfirst through the office window. Nadeau grabbed for him and almost caught his foot. Zioncheck fell five stories, his body turning like a stick, and landed on his head in front of the automobile in which Rubye was sitting. He was killed instantly.

Nadeau picked up the note Zioncheck had been writing. It was scrawled on the stationery of the House Naval Affairs Committee, and it read: "My only hope in life was to improve the condition of an unfair economic system that held no promise to those that all the wealth of even a decent chance to survive let alone live . . ."

The Washington Commonwealth Federation had withdrawn support from Zioncheck a few days before his suicide, but it stuck with another questionable candidate right up to the day of the primary. John C. Stevenson was a husky, bald-headed mystery man who first attracted attention in the Northwest as the unctuous voice of the Painless Parker chain of advertising dentists. His salary was reported to be $1000 a week, and he lived up to it; his house was one of the finest in town, he flew a $20,000 plane, he piloted a cabin cruiser on Puget Sound. While proclaiming the luster of his patron's lifelike dentures, Stevenson built up a large radio audience; he liked being an oracle and soon was hawking political nostrums along with dental floss. He had the technique down pat: he criticized specific wrongs and proposed vague remedies. In 1932 he filed in the Democratic primary for King County commissioner. He ran as "Radio Speaker John C. Stevenson," and in a field of nobodies he couldn't miss. He was radical enough to appeal to Seattle's great mass of unemployed and underpaid; he was plausible

enough to appeal to the farmers who normally shunned the type of soothsayer who found favor on the Skid Road. From the day he was elected, he was the most important commissioner any county in the state ever had. He was, as the saying goes, "a comer," and the Washington Commonwealth Federation was delighted to sponsor him.

But there was more to Stevenson than met the ear. He had materialized out of nowhere, like the great Gatsby, and there were odd rumors about where he got his wealth. When he was about to be sworn in as county commissioner, a citizen arose to protest that Stevenson wasn't a citizen, that he had flown in the Royal Canadian Air Force and was a Canadian. Stevenson admitted he had flown for Canada, denied that he was a Canadian, and refused —on grounds of possible self-incrimination—to reveal the name he had been known by in Canada. He was allowed to take office.

A few months later Governor Lehman of New York informed authorities in Olympia that Stevenson was known back East as John P. Stockman and was wanted for fraud in connection with a fake stock sale. Stevenson said he was Stockman, all right, but that he was innocent; he fought extradition. Governor Martin was in an uncomfortable spot. Should he, or should he not, turn over to New York a man who was at once an influential Democrat and a serious rival? He refused extradition and eventually the charges against Stevenson were dropped. Any gratitude that the Radio Speaker felt did not last beyond 1936. In the summer of that year Stevenson felt he was ready to take the state away from Governor Martin and filed in the Democratic gubernatorial primary. The voters were faced with a complicated choice between the rich, honest, unimaginative, conservative incumbent and his rich, opportunistic, brilliant, radical opponent.

The Commonwealth Federation supported Stevenson, ardently at first, then less enthusiastically when it became apparent that he was going to lose. What went wrong with the Radio Speaker's campaign was an experimental election device—the state is always

adopting such devices, to the confusion of professional politicians —the blanket primary. Under this system voters can shop around and vote for one candidate for each office, no matter which party he is running for. Any Republican who felt like it could vote for Governor Martin in the primary, and since the Republican nomination was in the bag for moss-backed ex-Governor Roland Hartley, thousands of Republicans joyously indicated they would help the conservative Democrats beat Stevenson in the September primary.

Nobody trusted the public opinion polls very much, but when the gamblers started giving two-to-one on Martin, the Commonwealth Federation bosses decided it was time to cut and run. At the last possible moment they held a quick caucus and announced they were filing a write-in ticket of their own for the November finals. The Commonwealth candidate would be Howard Costigan, a former barber and mural painter, who had talked his way into the position of executive secretary for the Federation. This tactic was based on a correct interpretation of the way the primary votes would run, but it infuriated Stevenson and his supporters and it helped split the Federation.

Stevenson lost the nomination by 40,000 votes. Any joy Governor Martin felt in his victory over the Radio Speaker must have been chilled by the fact that the voters who rejected Stevenson renominated Vic Meyers, by the greatest vote any candidate ever received in a Washington primary. Vic got more votes than Martin in the final too, though both were landslide victors. And the Commonwealth exulted in Martin's discomfort. "Just let the governor leave the state," Howard Costigan remarked one day, "and Vic'll show him how a state ought to be run."

Governor Martin had realized four years earlier that if he left Washington, Vic would be acting governor and could, if the urge were on him, open the gates of the state penitentiary, or call the Legislature into session, or mobilize the National Guard. The governor had spent his entire four-year term within the borders of his state, and now the voters had given him another four-year term

as the lieutenant governor's political prisoner. It was embarrassing. A governor ought to get to Washington, D. C., once in a while, if only to milk a few extra million dollars of pump-priming funds from the federal government; going to Washington and coming home with word of a federal grant was always good politics, but it was a comfort Clarence Martin felt he must deny himself. His frustration became more active as the country slid into the recession of '38. The administration started priming the economic pump again, and Martin ached to see the boys.

Martin's chance came when Vic Meyers left the state for a vacation in California. The governor decided he could pay a flying visit to the capital. As soon as the Commonwealth Federation learned he was gone, a hunt for Vic was begun; all they could learn was that he was on a fishing trip somewhere along the California coast. Radio stations up and down the coast were asked to page him. A day later Vic learned that he was wanted; he got to a phone and called Howard Costigan at Commonwealth headquarters. Costigan told him "to get the hell up here and be governor." Vic didn't even bother to change shoes; he started north in fishing sandals. He picked up a police escort, which cleared the road as he raced for a train.

While Meyers rushed north, the Commonwealth Federation leaders drew up plans for a special session of the State Legislature to be called by Vic. They thought the recession would give them a good chance to pass relief measures that Martin believed too generous.

Martin's men learned that Meyers was on his way. They phoned the governor back East and warned him. But no commercial flight would get him home in time to head off Vic, and once a special session was called there was no way to un-call it. Martin phoned an airline and learned it would cost him more than a thousand dollars to charter a plane. "Get me one," he said and rushed for the airport.

Meyers made it into the state first, but it was at night. He would

have to wait until eight a.m. to file his notice of the special session with the secretary of state. The Commonwealth Federation had all the papers ready. At five minutes after eight Vic rushed into the capitol and handed Secretary of State Belle Reeves the formal statement summoning the State Legislature into special session.

But Vic wasn't governor any more. Thirteen minutes earlier, at 7:52 a.m., Clarence Martin's chartered plane had come down outside Spokane. Meyers was lieutenant governor again, and a lieutenant governor can't call the legislature into session. Vic protested to the State Supreme Court but the jurists did not see things his way. Martin was unhappy too. He had won the race but he knew now he would not be able to leave the state again until either he or Vic was out of office. The airline sent him a bill of $1,308 for use of its plane.

Goings-on like this led Postmaster James Farley, after a visit to Seattle, to remark, "There are forty-seven states and the Soviet of Washington." Against this background of Hooverville and hocus-pocus politics Dave Beck fought his way to domination.

3.

In 1933 the National Recovery Act was signed by President Roosevelt. Section 7-a stated that "employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and shall be free from interference, coercion, or restraint of employers of labor or their agents." Across the land the great drive to unionize the workers began.

Dave Beck was ready and waiting, willing and able. He had by this time rounded up everything on wheels in Seattle. He was perfecting his technique of unionizing a plant by "organizing the boss"—convincing him that he could make more profit by paying higher wages and thereby creating stability. Where other union leaders were calling the bosses names, Beck soft-soaped them.

"Some of the finest people I know are employers," he kept repeating.[6] He was too shrewd to rely mainly on propaganda. Behind the sweet words was the economic force of the Teamsters, who could refuse to haul supplies to any outfit that fought Beck. Professional bullyboys made it unhealthy to drive anything for pay if you didn't wear a Teamster button. Trucks were sideswiped and overturned, men who voted wrong at the Central Labor Council were beaten up. People heard the apocryphal Teamster slogan, "Vote no and go to the hospital." Judge James T. Ronald of the Superior Court studied the organizing tactics and declared them "so shameless and disgraceful as to parallel the lawlessness witnessed at times in certain saloons in pioneer days. If such is unionism, which I am unwilling to believe, then the world is witnessing the beginning of the end."

Such stories didn't hurt the Teamsters; they discouraged opposition. It was effective Teamster propaganda when one of the union's lieutenants, Al Rosser, was sent to the penitentiary for hiring men to burn down a box factory that refused Teamster services. Other hesitant employers—and workers—had an object lesson in how far some of the boys might go.

Beck, of course, never believed in labor violence as an end in itself. He stood for law and order and, above all, stability. The Teamsters threw their weight around only as long as it was necessary for them to prove they could be tough. Once the fact of Teamster power was firmly in the public mind, the boys were well behaved. Even so from time to time there were reminders of what opposition might bring. The Teamsters once hired Leo Lomski, the Aberdeen Assassin, a perennial contender for the light-heavyweight championship of the world, to serve as business agent during a strike; and when the CIO was stressing the need to "educate the workers," Beck hired a jiu-jitsu expert to educate his

[6] A Teamster remarked recently, "Dave used to say some of his best friends were bosses. Now I'll bet he tells the bosses some of his best friends drive truck."

Teamsters. "What we are after," he explained, "is a big strong union."

The Teamsters were strong, all right, but it took William Randolph Hearst, the publisher, and Alfred Renton ("Harry") Bridges, the longshore boss, to make them respectable. The year of the great transformation was 1936.

4.

Seattle had three papers in 1936 and none of them liked Dave Beck. The dominant papers, the *Times* and *Post-Intelligencer*, which Hearst bought in 1921 had a running feud to see which hated him the most. In May of that year the Newspaper Guild began a drive to organize the *Post-Intelligencer*. Two of the most active members in the Guild chapter were Everhardt Armstrong, the drama editor, and Frank Lynch, the chief photographer; they were good men who had been with the paper for more than fifteen years. Shortly after they let the management know they were in the Guild, Lynch was fired for "inefficiency" and Armstrong for "insubordination."

The Guild tried to negotiate for their reinstatement, but the management refused to talk about it. The Guild filed an appeal with the National Labor Relations Board and also put the matter before the Central Labor Council. Beck dominated the council, and it voted to put the *Post-Intelligencer* on the unfair list. That meant strike. Beck ordered the Teamsters to join the picket line and the union men turned out in force. To everyone's surprise, so did hundreds of unorganized citizens who didn't care for the paper or for William Randolph Hearst. There were housewives in trim frocks, faculty members from the University of Washington, lawyers, clerks, and at least four ministers of the Gospel on a picket line that jammed the streets for a block in each direction from the plant. The typographical unions refused to pass the picket line. A few non-Guild reporters slipped through and cov-

ered their beats by telephone; they pecked out copy in the echoing city room, but without the backshop men no paper could be printed, and even if one were printed it would have been difficult to distribute.

The executives of the *Post-Intelligencer* appealed by phone to the owners of the *Seattle Star,* who said that if the *P-I* sent them the copy they would print their rival's paper. But how could they get copy to the *Star?* There was a call for volunteers, and a chubby young reporter stepped forward. He'd carry the news through the picket line. He stripped down, wrapped the copy around his body and legs, dressed, and slipped safely through the crowd around the building.

The *Star* plant was across the street from the Labor Temple. As the reporter neared his goal he ran into one of the strikers, who was accompanied by a pair of large men with cauliflower ears, wearing heavy shoes, brass-studded belts, and shiny new Teamster buttons. "What you doing up here?" the striker asked. The reporter was up to the occasion: "I was just going to the Labor Temple to sign up with you guys." So they took him to the Temple and enrolled him in the Guild. Afterward, happy in the success of his stratagem, he slipped into the *Star* building; but the *Star* printers refused to set the type on the ground that to do so would constitute a lockout of the *P-I* backshop. When the four-month strike ended the Guild fined the reporter five dollars for each meeting he had missed, and the meetings had been daily.

The *Times'* attempt at assistance was purely editorial but it backfired just as loudly. General Blethen—the son of the late Colonel—dictated a hot editorial that closed with some explosive (and expensive) rhetoric. "How do you like the look of Dave Beck's gun?" he demanded. "Oh, the shame of it!" Beck sued the *Times* for libel. He asked $250,000 and settled out of court for $10,000.

Hearst took to the air. He brought in a battery of public-relations men, bought hours of radio time, and filled the radio channels with

sound and fury. Beck was pictured as a racketeer and—of all things—a Red. Beck sued the *P-I* and the stations for $500,000, and later settled out of court for $15,000. The Hearst orators shifted their attack; they argued that freedom of the press was endangered and that a labor dictatorship was being established. The Guild had no money to buy radio time but it had plenty of supporters, so it organized some of its well-wishers into a telephone brigade. Whenever a station carried a pro-Hearst broadcast, the telephone brigade swamped the switchboard with indignant demands that the Guild's side of the story be told. Station managers began to give the Guild free time to reply to charges made on purchased time.

The Hearst people formed a Law and Order League, which started to take an inventory of firearms owned by its members; there was talk of an armed phalanx which would crash through the picket line around the plant. That talk died down after a mass meeting of Guild supporters, at which not only ministers but the mayor and the prosecuting attorney spoke on behalf of the strikers. Warren G. Magnuson, the handsome young prosecuting attorney of King County, carried a Teamster card in his wallet and had the Commonwealth Federation endorsement for the late Marion Zioncheck's seat in Congress. Magnuson cited laws guaranteeing the right to strike and the right to picket. Those laws must be obeyed, he said. The mayor, John F. Dore, once friend of the businessman, told the cheering crowd of five thousand that if the Law and Order League appeared with guns, the city police would take the weapons away from them in the interests of law and order. "I don't care if the *Post-Intelligencer* ever publishes," he said, "and I think it would be a good thing for the town if it didn't."

The emergence of John F. Dore as the four-square friend of the workingman (Central Labor Council variety) was Seattle's most enchanting political somersault since Hi Gill ran as a reformer. Dore had been elected mayor in 1932 (the year of Vic Meyers' political unveiling) on a cut-the-costs-and-reduce-the-taxes program. He had trimmed the budget, fired everybody he

could fire without getting in trouble with Civil Service, lowered the taxes, kept the city well in the black—and then lost the 1934 election to an amiable young lawyer named Charles Smith, whose administration devoted itself largely to getting national publicity for Seattle by staging diaper-changing contests, put-out-the-cat contests, and icemen-racing-for-housewife's-kiss contests. Dore was disgusted. He felt that his sponsors had let him down. He had delivered economies for the businessmen, the businessmen had not delivered votes for Dore. That was a hell of a way to do business. Dore began to shop around for a new political sponsor and found one in Dave Beck.

When Dore ran for mayor again in 1936, this time with the backing of the Teamsters, he won handsomely. "Brother Dave Beck was the greatest factor in my election," he told the State Federation of Labor after the vote was counted, "and I say again that I am going to pay back my debt to Dave Beck and the Teamsters in the next two years, regardless of what happens."

Beck's political flank was guarded; neither police nor private guards were going to disrupt a Teamster picket line. The *P-I* strike settled into a siege. It became apparent that ultimate victory might hinge on the state and national election results. The Republican gubernatorial candidate was campaigning on the issue of the *P-I* strike. "If I were in Olympia," ex-Governor Hartley said, "I'd smash that strike." Nationally the Hearst chain was pouring out editorials in favor of Alf Landon; the Democrats made no secret of their delight that one of Hearst's spigots was plugged. Both sides waited for the political decision in November. The Republicans lost and Hearst surrendered. He wrote an editorial praising Roosevelt as the possible successor of Andrew Jackson, and a little later he announced that the *Post-Intelligencer* would resume publication with Roosevelt's son-in-law, John Boettiger, late of the *Chicago Tribune*, as its new publisher. Hearst said that Boettiger would have a completely free hand.

The handsome young publisher arrived in town with Anna

Roosevelt as helpmeet and assistant publisher and editor of the homemaker page. The President's son-in-law was not unmindful of the role Dave Beck had played in his rise from the editorial ranks to that of publisher. Boettiger told the assembled dignitaries at a welcoming banquet that he considered Seattle a "model industrial community." Never again did the *Post-Intelligencer* attack Beck, and when Westbrook Pegler or one of the other syndicated columnists made unfriendly remarks about the Teamster leader, *P-I* editors protected the public by deleting the heresy.

Nor did the *Times* find anything wrong with Beck after 1936. Its editorials, which once had equated Beckism with bolshevism and the Teamsters with terror, suddenly became models of restraint. It was not that General Blethen loved Beck the more; it was that there had appeared on the labor scene a man he loved much less. He was Harry Bridges, president of the Pacific Coast Longshoremen's Union, CIO.

The tough little longshoreman was the perfect foil for the bland and businesslike Beck. If anything could make the Teamsters look attractive to employers, Bridges could, and did. Beck was born in America; Bridges was a foreigner who hadn't bothered to become a citizen. Beck was a member of the American Legion and an active Elk; Bridges was an avowed radical. Beck was plump, well groomed and dressed conservatively; Bridges was angular as a chunk of coal, his linen was sometimes less than fresh, he wore cheap suits and dark shirts, and when he did try to dress up he looked, according to one of his admirers, "like a retired pimp."

Intellectually they were just as far apart. Beck understood the desire to accumulate money; Bridges never seemed to give a damn about a dollar. Beck told a reporter, "We recognize that labor cannot receive a fair wage unless business receives a just profit on its investment." Bridges, answering a question after a speech at a University of Washington luncheon club, said, "We take the stand that we as workers have nothing in common with the employers.

We are in a class struggle, and we subscribe to the belief that if the employer is not in business his products will still be necessary and we still will be providing them when there is no employing class. We frankly believe that day is coming."

Behind Beck and Bridges were two great labor organizations, the old and conservative American Federation of Labor and the new and experimental Committee for Industrial Organization. The groups stood for opposing principles of union organization. The AFL had flowered late in the nineteenth century, before the rise of mass-production industries; its structure was centered around craft unions, local unions of specialists, which formed central unions within each city and federations within each state, which in turn formed national and international trade unions. This structure was not ideally constituted for dealing with mass-production industries, where the output was the product of many hands, some skilled, others unskilled.

For years men within the AFL had argued for "vertical" unions made up of all the workers within an industry, no matter what their craft. Jimmy Duncan of the Seattle Labor Council, one of the leaders of the general strike, had spoken up in national convention for the One-Big-Union concept so often that he was nicknamed "Resolutions" Duncan, but a shift to industrial unionism would have disrupted the existing organization of the AFL. It might have endangered the control of the leaders of the craft unions, and few men in history have voted themselves out of power.

In 1935 John L. Lewis and leaders of unions operating in the mass-production fields set up a Committee for Industrial Organization. The group said it would work within the framework of the AFL, but the AFL executive council objected on the ground that it feared industrial unions would eventually get into jurisdictional disputes with craft unions. The Lewis committee was told to disband. It refused, and the AFL executive council expelled its members. Lewis and his followers turned their committee into the CIO.

They took with them one-third of the membership of the AFL, and they at once began a nationwide drive to organize the workers on an industrial basis.

Harry Bridges was the outstanding CIO leader on the West Coast; Dave Beck dominated the AFL in the same area: their unions were bound to clash. Battle was joined all along the coast, but it was most savage in San Francisco and Seattle. In both ports the pattern of the struggle was the same: Bridges controlled the beach and Beck dominated the hills. They fought for hegemony over the men who worked in the warehouses that lay in no-man's land. When the organizers and agents and rank-and-filers of the rival unions met at the warehouses fights broke out, brutal and spectacular. Truck drivers and dock-wallopers tend to be hardy; they also run large; much of the fighting was in the heavyweight division.

Behind the union men, who fought as a sideline to their regular duties, were some goons, specialists in rough-and-tumble tactics, who served as paid stormtroopers and were thrown into the battles when the going got rough. One of the Teamster fighters, Tony Harn, is now a legend along the Skid Road. He was injured so badly in a battle that his left arm calcified into a club. Once back in action, "Stonearm" Harn delighted in braining sailors with the weapon they had given him. Teamsters without Harn's natural advantages usually went into battle armed with sawed-off softball bats that had been trimmed to fit inside the sleeve of a coat. The stevedores used their cargo hooks, and the sailors—who were on Bridges' side—turned their fists into war clubs by wrapping them with metal tape.

During the most violent period Mayor Dore again delivered for his supporters. The city police looked the other way when the Teamsters were winning their riots, broke them up and arrested the CIO men when the Teamsters were getting licked.

Red-faced Johnny Dore paid a high price for keeping a political promise. Prices were rising and the voters were sick of goon squads and labor violence. Though the Teamsters gave Dore their all-out

support in 1938, he was defeated in the primary, running third; the finalists were Arthur Langlie, a conservative young lawyer whose platform called for honesty and impartiality, and Lieutenant-Governor Vic Meyers, who retained his state position while campaigning as the CIO-Commonwealth Federation man on a social reform ticket. Vic's only memorable wisecrack of the campaign came when Dore called him a Communist: "Who the hell ever heard of a Communist with a middle name of Aloysius?"

Many businessmen did not rejoice in Beck's political rebuff. The *Argus*, a slick-paper weekly with an editorial tone that echoes the conversation in the sedate Rainier Club, warned its readers that nothing good would come if Langlie kept his promise to be impartial. "Langlie . . . will make Seattle an open labor town and allow the Lewis and Bridges elements to enter unhampered. That would promptly result in a new period of labor turmoil and in the undoing of all the progress that has been accomplished . . . in creating harmony and economic cooperation in Seattle." The *Argus* needn't have worried. The Teamsters had the town well in hand. "This town is going to be organized," Beck warned the businessmen. "Choose me or Bridges." He organized the bosses. Except along the waterfront, the laboring force of Seattle was his, to have and to hold and to use.

Dore died soon after losing the 1938 election and Dave Beck helped carry him to his grave. Though Beck had lost an election and a faithful political servant, he must have found consolation in the realization that he had won the city. He had captured the hearts of the businessmen in his home town. He had sold himself as the lesser evil.

5.

Dave Beck's system for Seattle has been called by many names. The Commonwealth Federation described it as "labor fascism." The *Los Angeles Times*, which didn't like Beck any more than the radicals did, used his name like a four-letter word and called

Teamster organizing policies "beckism." For a time people in Seattle called Beck's system "Dave's Little NRA," because, after the Supreme Court had outlawed the National Recovery Act and its price-fixing agreements, the Teamsters seemed nearly as effective in preventing price-cutting as the federal government had been. But after a few years under Beck's system, Seattle no longer spoke of it or questioned it: Beck's stabilization tactics were accepted, like the rain.

Charges of price-fixing would bring a flush to Dave Beck's pink face: price-fixing was illegal. The only time his Teamsters were ever charged in court with conspiring to fix prices—and that was back in 1928—they were acquitted. One of Beck's lawyers in that suit was Lewis B. Schwellenbach, who later won a seat in the Senate and was appointed Secretary of Labor by President Truman. Beck said repeatedly that he "never sat down with industry and discussed a price." His critics pointed to a contract he negotiated in 1927 with a laundry association, under which laundry-wagon drivers were to be paid $18 a week and a 12-percent commission, the contract setting a standardized price list on which commissions would be paid. Beck denied this was price-fixing.

Beck also fumed at the suggestion that he had raised the cost of living in Seattle. "What kind of damn fool would I be to do that?" he once asked me when I raised the question. "Say we have 500 bakery drivers. Would I penalize the other 29,500 men I have in Seattle to benefit that 500 by raising bakery prices? Sure there has to be regulation. Hell, the day when there was unrestricted competition with no regulation is long gone. You don't think so, you go downtown and buy a plane ticket to Chicago and see how unrestricted competition on plane tickets is. But I don't raise the cost of living and there's no damn truth to saying we pyramid the cost of living.

"Now I ask you, does Dave Beck set the price of Coca-Cola in Seattle? You pay exactly what they pay in Alabama for Coca-

Cola. Five cents a Coke. Same with other products. Look at the national magazines. The prices are set nationally on products, nationally; and if they are higher in the West they're higher all over the West, not just up in Seattle. But those people who make Coke, and things, they pay my people more wages; they pay them higher wages but they charge the same price here in Seattle that they do where they pay their workers half as much. Any intelligent person knows Dave Beck can't set prices."

On the other hand, Beck made no bones about the fact that he did everything he legally could to "stabilize conditions" for an industry that did business with him. "Our aim has been to develop better understanding between industry and labor," he said when asked about his Seattle system. "This is our contribution toward good government and better relationship between all classes and elements in the community. We have inculcated the concept that there is a definite understanding between those employed and those who invest capital. We do our part to make the system work. We observe our contracts to the letter."

Employers agreed that when they signed with Beck they could count on their labor force's staying on the job for the duration of the contract. Beck kept his promises to the letter, and he abhorred strikes. The boss could be sure his workers would do a reasonable amount of work. Nor need the employer worry that his men would be indoctrinated with anti-capitalist ideas by the union. Beck didn't believe in "educating" the workers; he held that such talk was "just a lot of CIO-communistic stuff." Anyway, Beck could spread the eagle farther than most patrioteers. He was an all-out anti-Communist who used fear of the Reds as one of his big selling points. "I stand unalterably opposed to the CIO and the sitdown strike," he said in 1937, while courting the bosses. "The seizure of private property by sitdown strikes will breed revolution. The Communists are behind it." Later he assured readers of the *Elks Magazine* that he believed "in a system where a man can be a menial today and own his own business tomorrow;

where he and his family can look up at the stars once in a while and laugh and love and learn." As a member of the University of Washington Board of Regents he favored firing faculty members who took the Fifth Amendment.

The businessmen who dealt with Beck could be reasonably sure that Beck's love of free enterprise would not extend to anyone enterprising enough to trim prices. A firm that cut prices in Seattle might find that it had violated some clause of its agreement with the Central Labor Council; a picket could appear on the sidewalk, and the Teamsters could refuse to haul supplies past the picket line. Since the Teamsters control "everything on wheels, everything that moves," the cut-price outfit would either have to fall in line with the rest of the industry or go broke. "We do not want any of our industries to operate without a fair profit," Beck said repeatedly. To keep profits up he was willing to discourage newcomers from entering into competition with industries the Teamsters serviced. He told Richard Neuberger, in the Oregon journalist's pre-Senate period, that Seattle had too many filling stations. "We are going to close some of them," Beck said. "First I advise promoters against starting new stations. If that doesn't work, the Teamsters Union simply will refuse to serve them. They won't last long." The threat was enough to discourage newcomers for some time.

Beck preferred to do business with associations of employers, and his relations with such associations were cordial and close. The Cleaners and Dyers Association, formed in the early thirties, was operated by Beck's good friend William Short, a former president of the State Federation of Labor. The association took in nearly all the plants in Seattle. One of the few holdouts was the little Clean-Well establishment, operated by the Stalin brothers, Max, Sol, and Joe. After the plant had been shaken and smoked and singed by a series of still unexplained explosions and fires, its owners were converted from their primitive belief in unrestricted competition to an understanding of the benefits of the business-

association form of collectivism. They joined the Cleaners and Dyers Association, paid dues of one per cent on their retail volume, charged standard prices, and lived happily ever after.

The Bakers Association is another typical example. Its members pay dues according to their volume of business. In return they have the right to put a Bakers' union label on their products. Without the label goods cannot be handled by any Teamster.

Beck's definition of a Teamster was wondrously flexible. In Seattle the men who work in breweries are Teamsters. That is the result of a national jurisdictional dispute in which both Teamsters and Brewery Workers claimed jurisdiction over the men who drove beer trucks. The brewers won in the Midwest, so Beck declared that if Teamsters couldn't drive beer trucks in Milwaukee and other "Eastern" beer centers, brewers couldn't make beer in his bailiwick: Teamsters would brew the beer. He quickly organized Northwest breweries, not overlooking the opportunity to avail himself of stock in several of the largest. Employers went along with the shift in organization of their workers; anyone who held out, it was carefully rumored, might have trouble getting hops or bottles or, perhaps, workers in shape to work. After the Teamsters were making beer Beck declared that any beer hauled in the Northwest would have to carry the white label of the Teamster union; Eastern manufacturers might ship their red-labeled products west by train but nobody would truck the cases and kegs to stores and taverns. When Beck heard that the CIO Woodworkers had passed a resolution urging loggers not to drink Teamster-made beer, he said, "They'll either go one hell of a way for a drink or get damn thirsty." For years Northwest brewers were free from the competition of such big-name brewers as Pabst and Schlitz. The Eastern beer men got out injunctions, but the Teamsters got out the pickets: no Eastern beer moved. By the time the dispute was settled, Northwest beer (much of which is good) had secured domination in its home territory. In this industry too Beck kept things stable. When some

Northwest breweries lowered their prices Beck told a reporter, "We're going to those men and tell them if they want to go on like that, it's all right, but we won't work for them." He did not have to repeat the suggestion.

When Beck couldn't bring workers directly into the Teamsters, he sometimes wrapped them up in captive locals. The largest of these groups was the Retail Clerks Union. As far as the national AFL structure was concerned, the clerks had a union of their own, but when Beck saw his chance he stepped in and made a quick deal with department-store managers. The managers posted notices telling their employees to join. The Teamsters helped organize the locals, picked the officers, and provided office space in the Teamsters' spacious headquarters. When, some years later, officials from the Clerks national put in an appearance in Seattle and suggested they could handle things, Beck shooed them away.

Of all Beck's union people in Seattle, the clerks were probably the most unhappy: Beck never did win them a good contract. Rival union organizations claimed Brother Dave's clerks received the lowest wages of department-store workers in any West Coast metropolitan area. But since the clerks had been organized by indirection and without struggle, they didn't know how to defend themselves. Turnover among clerks is traditionally high; they have little feeling of labor solidarity and almost no strike experience. So from time to time, when told what their next contract would be, and told to sign it, they signed. After listening to the details of one such sweetheart contract that had been "won" for the clerks by one of Beck's Cadillac-driving subalterns, a girl whose wage was set by it remarked, "Gee, I don't know whether Brother Dave organized the bosses or the bosses organized Brother Dave."

It was a question workers at the Boeing Airplane Company, Seattle's dominant industrial payroll, were to ask themselves shortly after the war. The Machinists had organized Boeing's years before; in 1947 they called a strike. Dave Beck had long coveted some five thousand warehousemen working at Boeing

but represented by the Machinists. During the strike he declared limited war and began organizing the warehousemen behind the Machinist picket line. When the Machinists protested that they had been given jurisdiction over all hourly workers at the plant, warehousemen included, Beck blandly said that if that was the way the Machinists felt, the Teamsters would fight them for the whole lot of employees. And he did. Faced with battles against both management and Beck, the Machinists settled their strike on unfavorable terms, then braced themselves for Beck's organizing drive. The National Labor Relations Board called an election to determine which organization Boeing employees wanted to represent them. The Teamsters campaigned on the issues of responsibility and efficiency in unionism. The Machinists were simply anti-Beck; their slogan was "Don't Go Beckwards." The Machinists won, two to one. It was a major defeat for Beck, particularly bitter since it came in his home town.

Brother Dave's willingness to send his Teamsters through picket lines he did not consider legitimate failed to win favor among other unions. The State Federation of Labor roundly condemned his raiding and, in consequence, his local political influence began to decline. But Beck's threat of raids served a long-range purpose: it helped him maintain stability. Rival leaders whose main asset was the militancy of their membership hesitated to call strikes when they knew Beck might move in and start organizing a rival union behind their picket lines. Not being able to strike, they were less effective, and, being less effective, they lost power in relation to Beck.

The Teamsters' deteriorating relations with other unions helped splinter the once solid block of labor votes in Seattle and the state. Beck's endorsement became a questionable political asset. Arthur Langlie, who had begun his vote-catching in 1938 by drubbing Beck's personal mayor, ten years later unseated Beck's friend Monrad C. Wallgren as governor. Langlie's campaign was boldly anti-Beck; his political ads asked, "Do You Want A Beck-Dominated Governor?" He sent a letter to every union leader in the state, saying he would do business with any representative of organized labor except Beck, who "in his lust for power has attempted to destroy the free trade unions of this state." Langlie won, and Wallgren—who had appointed Beck to the Board of Regents of the University of Washington and had put one of Beck's boys, Paul Ravelle, in as head of the State Board of Transportation—blamed Beck for his defeat. "That man wanted too much," Wallgren complained to a Seattle newspaperman. "He thought he owned me because he gave me some campaign help. I could have won if it hadn't been for him." Since Wallgren's good friend Harry Truman carried the state by a comfortable margin that year, political observers believe that the Beck issue may well have been decisive in Langlie's victory.

Beck's loss of direct political power in his home town did not seem to bother him. He had had it when he needed it. An intensely practical man, he had little interest in politics as social theory. "Our role is confined to protecting the interests of our people," he once said. "When I look at a candidate I ask myself, what would his election do to my relations with the men I do business with?" His relations with those men remained solid. They regarded Beck as a savior, and he gloried in their respect. Though he could no longer elect a personal mayor, he remained firmly in the saddle in Seattle. He didn't have to worry about local politics. His eyes were on more distant horizons.

6.

Like most people who live in Seattle, Dave Beck thinks his home town the most desirable place in the world to live; he has always said he couldn't imagine moving elsewhere. But that did not mean Beck was satisfied to be labor boss of his favorite city: he loved his country too.

By the end of World War II, Seattle was 95 per cent organized.

It was only natural that Beck, one of the most efficient labor organizers in America, should be interested in wider fields than those furnished by the remaining 5 per cent. He began looking beyond Seattle as early as 1937, when he organized the Western Conference of Teamsters, a brilliantly improvised answer to the problems posed by the creation of the CIO and by over-the-road trucking.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen and Helpers of America, like Topsy and most AFL unions, had just growed; its power centered in the scattered urban communities where most trucking was done before the invention of the internal combustion engine. In each city or area the local boss ran things pretty much his own way, though it was advisable for the satraps to make an occasional low bow in direction of Indianapolis, where lived Dan Tobin, president of the Teamsters since 1907. This loose and democratic organization served well until the depression. In the early thirties there was a great spurt in long-distance trucking. And who had jurisdiction over the over-the-road men?

Beck created the Western Conference and was promptly elected its president. The Conference handled intra-Teamster relations in the West with which the national organization was not equipped to deal, but it did much more than that: it partially answered the advantages the CIO gained in vertical unionism. The Conference was divided into trade divisions; each division took in all the specialists in its line. This enabled Beck to apply pressure on a wide front; a baker, say, who bucked him in Sacramento might be hurt in Butte.

The Western Conference had more than 240 locals. They were in every important city in the eleven west-of-the-Rockies states, and in Hawaii and Alaska. The business agents of these locals, plus a staff of organizers at large, numbered nearly a thousand; all were indebted to Beck for their jobs. They were Beck's men and they gave him a loud voice in nearly every Central Labor Council in

the West. This increased his national influence in the Teamsters and in the AFL.

In 1947 Beck was named executive vice-president of the Teamsters International. It was a new post, created just for him, and it let him use his organizational talents on a nationwide basis. The Teamsters were already the largest union in the country, claiming more than a million members and showing a bank balance of $20,000,000. Beck planned a drive to increase the membership to four million. First the Teamsters established national conferences on trade lines, designed to net garage workers, cannery workers, laundry workers—any of fifteen categories of labor to which the Teamsters had laid claim. Beck did not ask that levies be made on locals or the international to finance this organizing drive: contributions were voluntary. The Western Conference gave most of the money; men who had proved themselves in the West were put in charge of the national trade divisions. They were Beck's men. He set up a national organizing headquarters in Washington, D.C., safely away from Teamsters International headquarters in Indianapolis, and he hired Burton K. Wheeler, the former liberal senator, as legal adviser.

For a time labor circles buzzed with talk that Beck intended to unseat his old benefactor, Dan Tobin. Such talk made Beck genuinely angry. "Dan took me off a laundry truck and made me what I am today," he said. "I won't run until he asks me." Tobin asked Beck to take over in 1952.

7.

Even Beck's enemies in Seattle saw profit in his elevation. He was the most powerful local man on the national scene. He could do important favors; for instance he could, and did, transfer large amounts of Teamster money from Indianapolis banks to Seattle. Local insurance men underwrote major Teamster policies. Small wonder that the Chamber of Commerce wired flowers when Beck

became international president, and a civic banquet was arranged to honor "the first citizen of Seattle."

Accolades from the business community were nothing new to the rotund Teamster. A Hearst business editor long since had noted with relief that Beck's attitude on social experiment paralleled that of the National Association of Manufacturers. The vice-president of the Northern Pacific had described him publicly as "a vigorous opponent of socialism and communist infiltration who is entitled to full and generous credit for his leadership." The president of the Northwest's largest private utility had said, "Beck is absolutely tops. With him around, we've had peace while it might have been hell." But it was Banker Nat S. Rogers, while president of the Seattle Chamber, who pointed up the attribute that made Beck seem to businessmen a pillar of rock amid the shifting sands of economic change. "He has," said the banker, "a sense that it is part of his responsibility to keep the profit motive alive."

Few had ever seen reason to doubt Beck's devotion to the profit motive, but in his postwar phase his observance of the rituals of being rich became more conspicuous. "Beck's attitude toward money," said one of his non-admirers on the University of Washington Board of Regents, "is uxorious." His clothes grew richer and better tailored, his office larger and more deep-toned, his cars longer, his phone conversations curter, his invitations to the annual Round Up Party at the Washington Athletic Club—a must for business and political leaders—more peremptory. It was during this period that Dave Beck moved from the modest frame house which had pinned him to the middle class, into a new Sheridan Beach estate with private pool, private cinema, even sumptuous private quarters for his private bodyguards.

Just as in Beck's early poverty one can see the spark that kindled the flames of both ambition and avarice, so can one see in Beck's fondness for material success a major cause of his success and his downfall. He understood and respected business, wanted to see

businesses make money, liked and respected businessmen, and wanted to be liked and respected by them; wanted, indeed, to be one of them. His attitude became that of a businessman who had cornered the market in transportation. He used his monopoly on movement to further other enterprises.

"I'm well paid," Beck told an interviewer who asked about his luxurious trappings. "The men like to have the fellow who negotiates for them show that he is in every way the equal of those with whom he deals."

If so, the Teamsters and the Clerks and the men who made beer and rolled barrels and all the others Beck had gathered into the fold must have been happy indeed. No businessman in the area was living higher off the hog than Brother Dave.

Among those with whom Beck was dealing at the time was Nathan W. Shefferman, president of Labor Relations Associates of Chicago, Inc., an odd organization with headquarters at 75 East Walker Drive, Chicago, branch offices in Detroit and New York, a number of emissaries at large, and fingers in the strangest of employer-worker pies. A self-styled expert, Shefferman had served briefly with the National Labor Relations Board in the thirties, then found employment as "consultant in employer-employee relations" for Sears Roebuck, and ultimately set himself up as a private entrepreneur in the labor-relations dodge.

For a fee Shefferman would advise employers on how to deal with their workers; he was an expert at finding ways by which his clients could avoid having their men organized, or, failing such perfection, in helping them get their people represented by locals with officials whose lack of militancy was matched by their surplus of pliability. Although Shefferman charged employers for his consultations, he performed helpful services for union leaders free. His specialty was getting things wholesale. A union president or business agent who wanted a television set or power mower or movie camera at cut rates had only to ask and good old reliable Nathan delivered. Sometimes it turned out that the man Sheffer-

man was obliging was the man one of his clients was negotiating with on a union contract, but sometimes not. Some thought they detected in Shefferman's wholesaling the rancid scent of the sweetheart contract, but Nate saw in it only friendship. "This is the only manner in which I had to build good will, and I had no other thing. We don't advertise, and we don't solicit and we don't have any formulas and no prescriptions or anything of the sort. My business was being friendly with these men."

In all the labor movement, the records were to show, Nathan Shefferman's best friend was Dave Beck.

8.

On January 6, 1954, a quiet little treasury agent who had once been a neighbor of Beck's in Seattle received orders from Washington, D.C., to look into the financial affairs of the president of the Teamsters International.

Claude J. Watson, the T-man, shared a number of attributes with Dave Beck. Each loved Seattle, each was devoted to sports as a spectator, each followed with pride a son's athletic career. But where Beck was conspicuous to a fault in Seattle affairs, Watson has been accurately described as "a man who would be inconspicuous in a phone booth." Few in Seattle today could name the man most instrumental in bringing Beck down. Yet it was Watson's sleuthing that turned the Sheridan Beach dream house into a nightmare for the Teamster leader and remade the nation's conception of Seattle's first citizen.

It did not take Watson long to learn that Beck's boasted business efficiency did not extend to his own record-keeping. Where his own financial transactions were concerned, Beck was a back-of-the-envelope businessman. What records Watson found, however, did not seem to add up to what was on Beck's income-tax return.

"In three or four months after we started," Watson quietly recalled later, "I knew we had something. The question was to

prove it. After those first few months there never was a question in my mind that we would be going to recommend a case. I just didn't know how good it was going to be. When you get older, you know too many things can happen in an investigation and you're not as optimistic as some of these younger agents are."

Watson shuttled back and forth across the country in search of statistics. Fifty agents were helping him, but he did much of the work personally. He flew to Chicago, New York, Minneapolis, Boston, Washington, Los Angeles, San Francisco. Records would disappear, people would refuse to talk; sometimes they lied. Trail after trail petered out, scents faded and others proved redolent of red herring. But bit by bit the evidence mounted up.

On March 12, 1957, three years and two months after he drew the assignment to investigate Beck, Watson turned in his report. It covered 445 pages of single-spaced typescript, and it warranted presentation to a grand jury. Ten weeks later Beck was indicted in Tacoma for income tax evasion. His friend Nate Shefferman stood charged with conspiracy to help him evade his taxes.

Even before Beck was indicted, the plot of his financial drama had become known to the nation. The Senate's watchdog Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field—the McClellan Committee—had also traced back the sweet smell of Beck's prosperity as far as 75 East Walker Drive, Chicago. A nationwide television audience followed with fascination and horror the hunt.

Shefferman, driven to corner in the witness seat, painfully talked. He admitted that as an adviser to management he had done much business with Beck. He had once given him a friendly $24,000; he had made him loans without interest; he had gone in partnership with him on real-estate deals; their sons had collaborated in a scheme to sell toy trucks to Teamster locals. Shefferman had, of course, bought things for Beck wholesale. But in addition to doing Beck his standard middleman service, he also served Beck as paymaster in a none too devious arrangement by which Beck

foisted his personal bills off onto the Teamster membership.

Beck's arrangement with Shefferman was simple. When the Teamster boss bought something, anything—it might be bow ties or bar-bells, roofing for his house or a Cinemascope screen for his playroom, loveseats or landscaping, knee drawers by the dozen or outboard motors by the pair—he simply sent the bill to Shefferman. And Shefferman paid the bill. Eventually he would be repaid by the Teamsters. Sometimes the money came from the Seattle local, sometimes from the Western Conference, sometimes from a Teamster public-relations fund in Los Angeles administered by a man involved in the Beck, Junior–Shefferman, Junior, deal to peddle toy trucks with union labels to Teamster locals.

Beck and other Teamster officials claimed that his arrangements for using union funds were legal—a point not disproved—and that his income from the Teamsters was really a loan rather than larceny. He repaid much of the money. To make the repayments and meet Internal Revenue demands Beck was forced to sell his Sheridan Beach house. The hardship was not overwhelming: he sold it to the Teamsters, who granted him the right to keep living in it indefinitely.

There were other ways Beck had made money in bulk or piecemeal. He bought land across the street from various Teamster headquarters and sold the real estate at marvelous mark-ups to the locals when they needed to expand. He bought gas stations near Teamster headquarters in Seattle and directed the boys to gas up at his stations. He established relatives in beer-distributing agencies. He set up relatives in a mortgage company and invested Teamster millions through it. While keeping his eye on the main chance, he did not neglect the little opportunities of economic life. For example, he sold the passes he received to the Seattle Rainiers Coast League baseball park to an elderly ex-Teamster who loved baseball. When the gaffer told Beck that because of ill health he could no longer afford to buy the tickets, Beck generously gave them to him, then paid himself from the Teamster treasury.

Called before the McClellan Committee, Beck repeatedly declined to testify, citing the advice of his attorney. In taking the Fifth Amendment (among others), a maneuver for which, as university regent, he had recommended that professors be fired, Beck said that if only he had the right to confront his accusers in court he would be cleared. But brought to trial in Seattle for having pocketed the receipts from the sale of a used Cadillac belonging to the Teamsters, he declined to take the stand in his own defense, and was found guilty, as was his son. Tried in Tacoma on six counts of income-tax evasion, he again avoided the witness stand and was found guilty on all counts.

On a showery afternoon in late February 1959, Dave Beck stood on the worn rose-colored rug in front of the bench in Federal Judge George Boldt's courtroom. Flanked by attorneys who, it was noted, looked more like next of kin than lawyers, the former first citizen of his city reddened slowly as the judge summarized his career.

"No bootblack or newsboy of Horatio Alger's imagination ever rose from a more humble beginning to a greater height than Dave Beck," said the judge. "From the driver's place on a laundry wagon to the seats of the mighty, national and international, is a greater climb than even Alger conceived for any of his heroes. Did we not know what we now do know of Mr. Beck, his success story would be as thrilling and inspirational as almost any in the history of American opportunity, enterprise and ingenuity. The exposure of Mr. Beck's insatiable greed, resulting in his fall from high place, is a sad and shocking story that cannot be contemplated by anyone with the slightest pleasure or satisfaction. A fair appraisal of the evidence shows beyond glimmer of doubt that, as an incident of his tax fraud, Mr. Beck plundered his union, his intimate associates, and in some instances personal friends, most of whom quite readily would have freely given him almost anything he asked. As more than one of the union executive witnesses put it: 'He could have written his own ticket.' "

SKID ROAD

An Informal Portrait of Seattle

by Murray Morgan

First illustrated edition,
with a new Preface and
concluding chapter by the author

University of Washington Press
SEATTLE AND LONDON

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Howard and Judith Daniel

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